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ABSTRACT

This guide provides general direction to school districts on elementary French programs. In addition to giving the rationale of an elementary French program and indicating where supplementary resource material can be found, it suggests program goals and learning outcomes for programs in grades K-7. A second section on current research on second language learning deals with the following topics: (1) the importance of learning a second language; (2) the ideal age for learning a second language; (3) organizational factors that affect teaching a second language; (4) other factors to be considered in a second language program, such as students' background, the effect on other subject areas, and inservice training; (5) some successful teaching methods; and (6) conclusions regarding expectations of various types of elementary programs. A sizable bibliography completes the volume. (AMH)

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ELEMENTARY

GUIDE

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT BRANCH
DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES-SCHOOLS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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ELEMENTARY FRENCH PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

An early beginning to the lengthy process of language learning is important. At the elementary level, and up to year 3 in particular, advantage can be taken of the pupil's natural ability to mimic the sounds of another language. Elementary school children at this age lack selfconsciousness and enjoy the oral aspect of learning a second language. They become readily involved in the broadening experience of discovering another culture. Of course, teaching methods and learning activities must be chosen to suit the child's stage of development.

Since the previous guide in 1966, four major changes have occurred:

1. the growing trend toward decentralization of curriculum and the non-prescriptive nature of courses.
2. a phenomenal growth, which began in 1974, in the number of elementary students receiving instruction in French.
3. the beginning of the teaching of French at varying age levels from K-7.
4. the teaching of French to children from the **whole** ability range.

These changes have made it necessary to prepare a revised curriculum guide which is flexible enough to use under varying conditions in the province.

Districts are permitted to offer an elementary French program (and to decide on the grades and number of schools in which to offer it) subject to the approval of the Board of School Trustees and the Superintendent. The program is not prescribed. The purpose of this guide is to provide general direction through indicating what might be the outcomes of an elementary French program.

Note: When French language studies are being introduced at the elementary level it is important to choose a program which can be developed sequentially into the secondary level.

RATIONALE OF THE ELEMENTARY FRENCH PROGRAM

The philosophy behind this curriculum guide can be found in the summary of current research on second language learning in Appendix A.

LaPorte Saint Louis (Quebec)

USE OF THE GUIDE

This curriculum guide essentially contains a rationale for offering French at the elementary level (Apprendix A) and an indication of the skills and attitudes pupils might acquire (in the form of goals and learning outcomes).

The Department of Education recognizes that districts offering elementary French often begin at different years (K-7), use different commercial or locally developed courses, and have different scheduling arrangements from other districts in the province. The learning outcomes are, therefore, not divided into courses by grade levels but are intended to provide a suitable structure for course development and materials selection at the local level.

It is important that the elementary French teachers of the district discuss these goals and learning outcomes and decide on the degree of emphasis and levels of expected achievement for each course offered in the district.

Other topics for meeting might include: translation of learning outcomes into more specific objectives, ideas for teaching strategies to meet outcomes, course design, selection of texts, and evaluation procedures. Consultation with secondary French teachers is also very important, in order to facilitate sequential programs.

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCE MATERIAL

It is anticipated that, in addition to this guide, the following item will be made available by the Department of Education:

A. A Resource Book

An **Elementary French Resource Book** which contains: a list of recommended commercial programs and supplementary materials, annotated as to contents, strengths, weaknesses, and recommended grade levels; a list of useful addresses; ideas on evaluation, etc. is available. A copy of the **Resource Book** may be obtained from:

Publication Services
Department of Education
Parliamen Buildings
Victoria, B.C.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EVALUATION

Evaluation determines whether, and to what extent, the learning outcomes have been achieved. Part of its purpose is to establish whether the minimum course standards set by the district or school have been met. Its other purpose, to improve educational decision making, is equally important.

If knowledge of a test result, checklist, or any other form of measurement does not enable the teacher to make a better decision, then the instrument serves little purpose and might just as well not be used. However, if one critically examines these measurements and **combines** this data with information such as informal observations and judgments, better decisions can be made about teaching and learning.

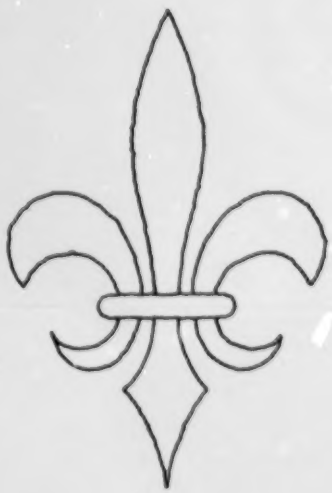
Some examples of how evaluation might be used include:

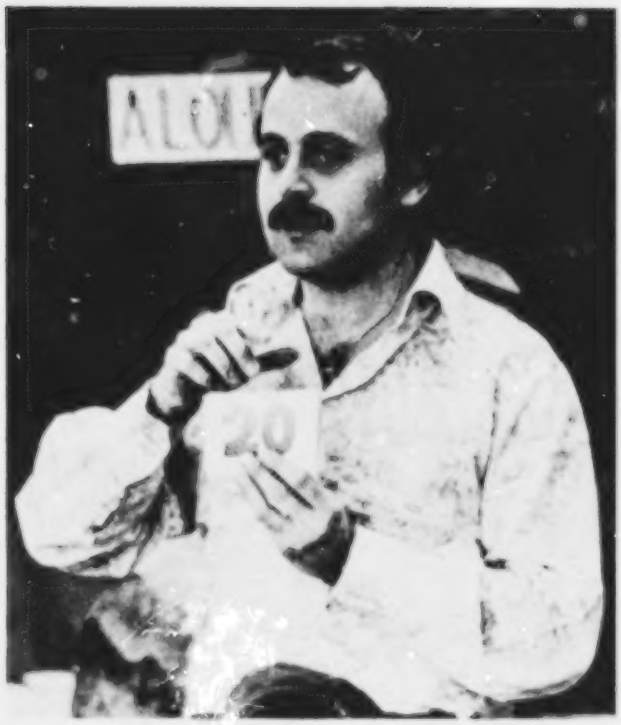
1. determining student knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the **start** of a course or unit. This will enable the instructional program to be tailored to both the needs of the individual and those of the group.
2. **ongoing** evaluation during a course or unit enables students to assess their progress and teachers to diagnose weaknesses and alter methods or materials accordingly.
3. evaluation at the **end** of a course or unit enables the teachers to know the degree to which outcomes have been achieved and to make judgements on the overall effectiveness of the instructional program.

Three audiences receive direct benefit from evaluation: students — who receive concrete information about their progress; teachers — who are able to plan programs based on factual information; and parents — who deserve a clear statement of what students are learning.

Throughout the elementary French program, and particularly in years one to four, it is important that teachers carefully and **systematically** evaluate student progress in speaking and listening. At years six, and seven, the evaluation of reading and writing should receive a new, but not overbalancing, importance.

Any evaluation misused can be destructive. Evaluation overused can interfere with the process it is designed to assist. Evaluation not used, however, denies teacher, student, and parent valuable information on progress being made.





DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Goal

A goal is a general statement of the intention of the program.

Learning Outcome

A learning outcome is a more specific statement rising out of one or more of the goals of the program.

An example of a learning outcome is:

> "By the end of Year 3 it is anticipated that the pupil should have had some **ORAL** experience with some basic structures such as:
> Voici, Voila, C'est un/une, Qu'est-ce que c'est?, greetings, questioning by intonation, commands and active and spoken responses to the commands."

Learning Outcome	Definition of Learning Outcomes
By the end of Year 3	a) indicates the general time limit
it is anticipated that the pupil should have had some **ORAL** experience with some basic structures	b) centres on the pupil
such as: Voici, Voilà, C'est un/une, Qu'est-ce que c'est?, greetings, questioning by intonation, commands and active and spoken responses to the commands.	c) provides a **general** description of the expertise desired. d) provides **some** specific examples, but not a complete list of all examples.

Year

In order to be consistent with other recent Department of Education guides for the elementary level, the word "year" has been used in place of the word "grade".

ELEMENTARY FRENCH PROGRAM GOALS, K-7

A. TO CREATE ENTHUSIASM FOR AND ENJOYMENT OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE.

At the elementary level a favourable and positive attitude toward the French language can be promoted by taking advantage of the desire of young children for physical participation in songs, rhymes, games, and other activities as part of a well-structured sequential program. It is anticipated that students may then be more likely to continue French studies in later years.

B. TO PROMOTE POSITIVE ATTITUDES TO THE WAY OTHER PEOPLE LIVE, THINK, AND EXPRESS THEMSELVES AND TO ENRICH AND EXTEND THE PUPILS' EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES BY ACQUAINTING THEM WITH THE FRENCH LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN CANADA AND THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.

C. TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE CHILD'S AGE, ABILITY, AND ANY PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE WITH THE FRENCH LANGUAGE, TO PROMOTE THE CONTINUING DEVELOPMENT OF A FUNCTIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE.

D. THROUGH PRACTICAL INVOLVEMENT WITH ANOTHER LANGUAGE, TO HELP THE CHILD HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH LANGUAGE AS:

1. A MEANS OF COMMUNICATION
2. A MEANS OF ORGANIZING THOUGHT

All language provides a means for children to organize their thinking into classes, categories, and sentence patterns.

E. WHERE POSSIBLE, TO INTEGRATE THE STUDY OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE WITH OTHER SUBJECT AREAS SUCH AS SOCIAL STUDIES, MATH, P.E., ART, AND MUSIC.

It is possible, to make the experience with the French language an integral, **and hence a more natural,** part of the child's day by occasionally using such methods as:

- using French instructions in P.E., Social Studies and other subjects
- singing French songs
- playing games in French.

F. TO DEVELOP, BY THE UPPER ELEMENTARY LEVEL, A LIMITED READING RECOGNITION OF MATERIAL WHICH STUDENTS HAVE ALREADY MASTERED ORALLY.

Major emphasis should still be placed on AURAL-ORAL communication. Even if year seven is their first year of formal instruction in French, the pupils **might** be given some experience with the reading of material mastered orally.

G. TO DEVELOP, BY THE UPPER ELEMENTARY LEVEL, THE STUDENT'S ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN SIMPLE WRITTEN FRENCH.

Major emphasis should still be placed on AURAL-ORAL communication. Even if year seven is their first year of formal instruction in French, the pupils **might** be given some experience with the writing of material mastered orally.

LEARNING OUTCOMES K-3

The learning outcomes for kindergarten to Year 3 can often be achieved through activities such as: songs, rhymes, and games. These activities, which would be understood generally though not necessarily in detail, would give primary children the physical participation which they need while providing vital exposure to the sounds of another language.

By the end of Year 3 it is anticipated that:

A. **SOUNDS**

The pupil would begin to be familiar and at ease with the intonation, rhythm, and sounds of the French language.

B. **BASIC STRUCTURES**

The pupil would have had **ORAL** experience with **SOME** basic structures including some verb structures such as:
Voici, Voila, C'est un/une, Qu'est-ce que c'est?, greetings, questioning by intonation, commands, and active and spoken responses to those commands.

C. **BASIC VOCABULARY**

The pupil would have had active and passive experience with a **LIMITED** vocabulary from some of the following centres of interest: objects in the classroom, parts of the body, family, numbers, colours, weather, days of the week, months, animals, clothes, food, and vocabulary for special days and holidays. THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOCABULARY AS SUCH IS NOT CRITICAL.

REMEMBER:

The given examples provide guidance.
They **DO NOT** attempt to list all possibilities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES 4-7

If the program is beginning in Years 4, 5, 6 or 7, the learning outcomes for Years K-3 should be approached first.

L'eglise Notre-Dame (Montreal)

By the end of the elementary program it is anticipated that:

A. **SOUNDS**

The pupils would be familiar and at ease with the intonation, rhythm, and sounds of the French language.

B. **BASIC STRUCTURES**

In addition to the above, depending on the pupil's previous experiences with French, the pupil may have had **ORAL** experience with **SOME** other basic structures such as:
use of "de" as an indication of possession, Il y a, Il n'y a pas, Combien de, C'est vrai, C'est faux, Quelle heure est-il?,

Quel temps fait-il?, De quelle couleur?, Où est?, and others.

Depending on the pupil's previous experience with French, the student could have had **ORAL** experience with **SOME** simple verb structures in the present tense using verbs such as: avoir, être, partir, faire, montrer, aller, vouloir, devoir, and others.

C. **BASIC VOCABULARY**

In addition to the above, depending on the student's previous experience with French, the pupil could have had **ORAL** experience with a **LIMITED** vocabulary from some additional centres of interest such as: sports, restaurants, cinema, cafe, transportation, shopping, parts of the house, time, and others.

It is anticipated that the children would have had **ORAL** experience with a **LIMITED** number of descriptive words such as: petit, grand, gros, très, nouveau, vite, lentement, bon, bien, mal, formidable, magnifique, and others.

The pupil might be expected to spontaneously use French expressions, such as greetings, outside the classroom.

D. **BASIC READING-WRITING**

As part of developing reading and writing skills, the pupil could learn to recognize and write such sounds as: eau, au, on, é, in, oi, e, and others in words already mastered orally.

The pupil may be able to read a simple illustrated story in French.

The pupil may be able to read and write a limited number of expressions mastered orally. Some examples might be:
C'est un chat blanc/C'est une vache ——————————.
C'est un garçon / Ce——————————des garçons.

E. FRENCH CULTURE IN CANADA AND OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD

The pupil should have some general knowledge of French Canada and French-Canadian culture such as: the geography of Canada, French-Canadian leaders, songs, folklore, folkdancing, customs, winter carnival, typical recipes, art, and others.

The pupil should have some general knowledge of France and the French people such as: the general geography of France, its leader, its attractions, its distinctive customs, and where French is spoken throughout the world.

REMEMBER:

The given examples provide guidance.
They **DO NOT** attempt to list all possibilities.

CURRENT RESEARCH ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the modern world, people who cannot speak at least two languages are obsolete.

Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson)
British Economist
Speaking at Carleton University
Ottawa[1]

He who knows no foreign language knows very little of his own.

Goethe

If any man can properly appraise the value of something he does not possess, I would place knowledge of languages high on the list of requirements for success.

Lord Beaverbrook
Canadian born millionaire
industrialist[2]

Many prominent people support second language learning. This paper examines current research into the importance of learning the language, the ideal stage in child development to begin the study of a second language, effective language teaching, how children learn languages, and several other factors to be considered in setting up a language program. The bibliography on which this research paper is based was established in consultation with Dr. Ruth White (U.B.C.), Kathryn Smith (U.B.C.), Dr. Barry Bartlett (S.F.U.), Dr. H. Brockhaus (W.W.S.C.), and Dr. H.H. Stern (O.I.S.E.).

[1]As cited in Penfield Wilder, *Second Thoughts*, 1970, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, p. 27.

[2]As cited in Parker, William R., *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*, 1961, Washington, U.S. Dept. of State, p. 115.

WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE?

Before considering any of the factors surrounding learning a second language, it is necessary to ask questions about its importance.

Several important by-products occur in the learning of a second language. Maria Alter, a well-known teacher of German, claims:

> Learning a foreign language leads to appreciating and understanding other people . . . what they have in common, but also (in) their differences.[3]

Sensitive language teaching is surely not only presenting vocabulary and drilling verbs. Studying the kind of people who speak the other tongue, what they have for breakfast, how they spend their Sunday afternoons, what music they listen to, is just as vital. A better understanding of other countries prevents us from believing misinformation and forming generalizations, such as that all Frenchmen overindulge in rich food or that Germans run everything with military precision.

With the awareness that other people speak and do things in other ways we realize that our own nation is just one of many great and different ones.

> The cultural value of foreign language teaching is great and irreplaceable. It develops and sharpens the intellectual facilities, widens and enriches the mind, ennobles the spirit, and arms it against prejudice and national complacency, facilitates contact with other peoples and other cultures . . .[4]

We hear of a "shrinking world" and a "global village"; all the more reason why we must learn to appreciate our Canadian neighbour, and neighbour nations, through language study.

Besides helping our children to understand other people, we try today to prepare them for a very uncertain future:

> . . . to teach them how to adapt to still fluctuating ideals, ways of life and problems, jobs and environments . . . language plays a key role in such training.[5]

As they are forced to think and speak in a way which is new and strange to them they may become more psychologically adaptable by being freed from the bonds of their own culture and gaining a new perspective on other ways of living.[6]

Another value in acquiring a second tongue has been expressed by a British Columbia educator, Dr. Chant:

> Knowing a second language is a useful accomplishment, especially in these times when travel to other lands is much more common than formerly, and when many occupations require a knowledge of some language other than one's own.[7]

Today we British Columbians can be in any European capital within half a day of leaving our doorstep. Leisure time is steadily increasing for people in many occupations and expensive trips may be quite easily financed. How much more rewarding travelling is when we can actually speak with the natives of the country we are visiting, and not be forced to rely on such frustrating and unnatural means of communication as sign language, pocket dictionary, or an intermediary such as a tour guide! Even a limited knowledge of another tongue is valuable in travel.

[3] Alter, Maria P., *A Modern Case for German*, 1970, American Association of Teachers of German, p. 13.

[4] Willigen, Daan M. Van, "The Cultural Value of Foreign Language Teaching", *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 48, no. 8, Dec. 1964, p. 476-483.

[5] Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 18-9.

[6] Chastain, Kenneth, *The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice*, 1971, Philadelphia, Centre for Curriculum Development, Inc., p. 19.

[7] Chant, S.N.F., *B.C. Royal Commission on Education Report*, 1960, Province of B.C., p. 316.

> . . . a foreigner coming to a country with some knowledge of its customs and some interest in its language is often especially welcome.[8]

Particularly in countries whose inhabitants have long since learned to expect foreigners to show no interest in the language of the country, the visitor who has made the effort to learn a little of the other tongue, even enough to say the equivalent of "thank you", meets with special friendliness.

Further, being bilingual is useful, if not essential, for many occupations in Canada today, including the civil service, the travel industry, journalism, teaching, university research, business, and federal politics. Also, language skills allow geographical mobility to take advantage of promotional opportunities in French-Canada or in countries outside the North American continent. In fact, without them there is little opportunity to anyone to go to another country and experience satisfying intercultural communication.[9]

Many international organizations find it wise to have their agents and employees in foreign places speak the language of the country they are working in.

> Business has found that by the adoption of foreign languages not only its representatives but the companies involved are treated with a great deal more respect and appreciation. And the interchange of business activities is accomplished more quickly and efficiently.[10]

Today many English-speaking Canadians would enjoy increased opportunities for advancement if they possessed at least a working knowledge of French. How many federal politicians and civil servants in recent years have enrolled in French immersion courses? Surely it would be easier and less time consuming for these people to take such "crash" courses if they possessed at least the rudiments of the language.

> As one language teacher phrases it:
>
> Language, once it is gained, can be put to work for you. It can help you in your business or occupation, in your social life, in your travels, in your enjoyment of the world in general. It expands your horizons, and makes accessible to you the treasuries of world thought, both in your own chosen line of endeavor and in that broad field of leisure which modern technology has put within reach of practically all men.[11]

[8]Pei, Mario, *Language for Everybody: What It Is and How To Master It*, 1956, New York, Devin-Adair Co., p. 20.

[9]Lange, Dale and James Charles (eds.), *Foreign Language Education: a Reappraisal*, 1972, Illionois, National Textbook Co., p. 365.

[10]Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

[11]Pei, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

WHAT IS THE IDEAL AGE TO LEARN A MODERN LANGUAGE?

The elementary French program as described in this guide would be **basically** focussed on the following four skills and attitudes:

1. native like pronunciation
2. good listening comprehension
3. willingness to communicate
4. positive attitudes toward the other culture

These four focusses are based on both physiological and psychological explanations rising out of current research.

The first of these areas is the good accent to be developed in elementary students within the limits of their vocabulary. Who has not remarked how a young child coming to Canada from a foreign country will be chattering in English — with a light accent, if any — in a matter of months? And who cannot point to adults who, after decades of speaking English, still bear the distinct traces of their native tongue in pronunciation, intonation, and word order? Almost certainly these people immigrated to Canada in their middle teens or later.

Before the age of about ten, children are able to mimic new speech with an almost mirror-like accuracy.[1] Dr. Wilder Penfield, the Canadian neurologist, theorized that the cells of the very young brain are more plastic or elastic than the adult's and so allow the child to imitate easily the sounds of another speech.[2] To demonstrate the brain's plasticity he showed that, in a small child who has had severe brain damage, certain areas will take over the function of the useless cerebral section. Also, the entire muscular system is naturally more flexible in early life, and this affects the muscles controlling the centres of speech.

To young children the native tongue is a relatively new acquisition, a language "habit" easier to mold. Around age ten and under they will more readily accept another language without trying to analyze what they are hearing and saying, and without attempting to compare new expressions word for word with those of the mother tongue.

The Burstall report,[3] a comparison of students who had started to learn French at age 8 (grade 3)[4] with those who hadn't started until age 11 (grade 6) did not test differences in accent at age 13 and 16. However, in the tests of spoken French:

> Primary school pupils introduced to the study of French at the age of 8 did, in fact, reach a higher level of achievement in spoken French than did secondary school pupils who had studied the language for an equal period of time, having begun their study at the age of 11 . . .[5]

The second aim of the elementary French program, that of developing good listening skills also has support in the research.

Elementary rather than secondary school students will feel more comfortable with, and adjust more readily to, the natural or direct way of learning another language. Since the natural way for a youngster to acquire a language is to hear the speech for a considerable period of time before producing his own, then ideally skills in listening and understanding are developed at the outset of language instruction. The younger the children, the less the native tongue will interfere with comprehension by their attempts to translate the other language word for word. The direct method of learning a second language is also particularly suitable to those under ten because they enjoy more the great amount of repetition, by ear and mouth, that this involves and the performing of physical actions that help to reinforce the expressions learned: "Jump Paul!" or "Laura, go to the door."

[1]Brooks, Nelson, *Language and Language Learning: Theory to Practice*, 1964, New York, Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., p. 117.

[2]Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 115-6.

[3]Burstall, Clare, *Primary French in the Balance*, 1974, Windsor, N.F.E.R. Publishing Co., Ltd., p. 134.

[4]Grades given are the Canadian grade equivalent for students of that age and do not imply equivalence in the British system.

[5]Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

Michael Buckby challenged some of Burstall's comparisons of those who had had primary French with those who hadn't on the grounds that: experimental and control pupils had been in the same class with the same teacher and that those with primary French experience would therefore have been slowed down and frustrated at being placed with older beginners; in addition older beginners could learn faster with the advantage of having experienced learners in the class, etc.[6]

Buckby used the Burstall results and controlled for the above effects by comparing classes of students with primary experience with unmixed classes of those who hadn't. He found that, at age 16, in **listening** and reading (the receptive skills) those with primary French experience did significantly better than those who hadn't taken primary French.[7]

What about willingness to communicate, the third aim of an elementary modern language program? When those who had elementary French were successful in their efforts to learn French they appeared to have a significantly more favourable attitude toward speaking the language than did those who had not had elementary French.[8]

Elementary children have two things going for them. They are both less self-conscious of producing "odd" and "funny" sounds and less inhibited about making mistakes in trying out a new speech than are older children. The readiness alone to attempt a second language is "half the battle". Much trial and error leads to the success necessary to build the confidence that contributes to fluency.

Burstall reports that for all adolescents there was "an increasing anxiety regarding the necessity to speak in French"[9] which is supported by Ferri in studies in other subject areas which indicated that high achieving students, and especially girls, gave greater anxiety about school work in general than did any other groups of students.[10] However experience with speaking French at the elementary level seems to make students more confident at the older age.

> Learning French in the primary schools — does seem to exert a lasting influence on the pupil's attitudes towards speaking French.[11]

Another interesting result of the Burstall report is the effect of early achievement in French on later attitudes toward learning the language. Thirty-nine per cent of those who started at age 8 continued to age 16, as compared with twenty-nine per cent of those who started at age 13.[12] "In the language learning context, nothing succeeds like success."[13]

The final basic goal of the elementary second language program is the development of a positive attitude toward the other culture.

Studies show that the years of childhood just before puberty are a time crucial to the development of interest in other cultures.

> . . . affectionate and outgoing attitudes towards foreign people reach their peak at about age 10 and thereafter become progressively less favourable.[14]

The reason for this is that pre-pubertal children are freer from the prejudices and negativism found during the early adolescent period. Because they experience a greater self-acceptance, this positive feeling extends more easily to other people. It is to be hoped that positive attitudes toward the French culture, although they may diminish for psychological reasons related to the onset of puberty, may be more easily restored at a later age.

Therefore, an elementary second language program can be enormously successful under certain conditions: if we do not expect miraculous bilingualism in British Columbia's isolated geographic location, and if we concentrate our attention on how and what elementary students learn best and most easily.

[6]Buckby, Michael, *Is Primary French Really in the Balance?*, unpublished report, 1975, Language Teaching Centre, University of York, England, p. 3.

[7]*op. cit.*, p. 3.

[8]Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[9]*op. cit.*, p. 168.

[10]*op. cit.*, citing Ferri, p. 168.

[11]*op. cit.*, p. 169.

[12]*op. cit.*, p. 191.

[13]*op. cit.*, p. 294.

[14]*op. cit.*, p. 134.

What then if an opportunity for early language learning (prior to age 10) is missed? All prominent researchers into second language learning emphasize that **the single most determining factor in learning a second language is the amount of time spent on it.** The Burstall team strongly supports prominent language educator J.B. Carroll that:

> the most important factor in foreign language acquisition may well prove to be the total amount of time spent actively in the learning situation, rather than the age of the learner at the beginning of the learning process.[15]

Michael Buckby, in his analysis of the N.F.E.R. report, agrees that the length of exposure to a foreign language is of crucial importance.[16]

Actually, students who study a second language for two years after age 10 may do better than elementary students who studied for the same two years before age ten — at least in specific areas of language learning. This is largely due to acquired learning skills which counterbalance the natural advantages of small children. However, beginning in early elementary grades can also provide an opportunity for many more years of language learning than beginning later.

Having considered the advantages children under ten bring to language learning, what are the advantages older learners bring?

Although the capacity for easy imitation is diminishing

> The older learner . . . may compensate for these handicaps by the strength of his motivation, by mature insight into the value of the learning process, and by having specific goals that serve to focus the effort.[17]

Older students are probably better motivated to learn because they are able to understand more clearly the value of having another language. For them the opportunity for travel and jobs is nearer at hand. Another motivating factor is the capacity to take a larger part in the decision to enrol in the language course.

Second, older students are naturally more experienced in the learning process. They have a better developed capacity to memorize, to analyze and to generalize, and so are able to absorb a greater amount of learning in the space of time allotted them.

Third, older pupils are more accustomed to learning indirectly, that is, by the written approach to a subject, by association and synonyms. So they will probably find printed "props" helpful and reassuring.

We may think of it this way: the younger student brings primarily physical advantages, and the older, mainly intellectual advantages to the learning situation. "As the curve of learning by imitation declines with increasing age, the curve of learning by analysis rises."[18]

> All that any person needs, to learn a foreign language successfully, is freedom from fear of being conspicuous by making "funny noises" of new associations of form and meaning; a reasonably good memory; and a willingness to progress by trial and error, not being afraid to make mistakes, but being willing to learn from those one makes. All of these prerequisites are matters of attitude, rather than of innate ability. Given these attitudes and a reasonable amount of energy and application any normal person . . . can learn a new language successfully.[19]

Before we ask if there is an ideal age to start learning a second language we must first determine the reason for studying it. If we wish our children to be comfortable in speaking the other language, have good listening skills, and a good accent, we should encourage them to start in the elementary school. However, if they need to have adequate speaking-listening skills and read and write well in the language, starting at more than age 11 is not a disadvantage.

[15] *op. cit.*, citing Carroll, p. 34.

[16] Buckby, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[17] Brooks, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

[18] *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[19] Hall, Robert A. Jr., *New Ways to Learn a Foreign Language*. 1966, New York, Bantam, p. 83.

> Each age of learning has its own particular advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, rather than asking whether language learning at such and such an age is effective, the question should be: How can one create an environment in which effective language learning can occur?[20]

We are aware that one of the most determining factors in success in any learning situation is motivation. The desire to achieve in second language study will go a long way towards compensating for what could be a disadvantage, for example, starting French at 14 and hoping to speak like a native. Although we cannot control the motivation our students bring to the second language classroom, nor sometimes their age, we can influence their attitude, and thus their success, by providing a happy and encouraging language study environment.

Finally, research indicates that time undoubtedly overrides age as a factor in second language performance. The number of hours spent in studying the language is more crucial to achievement than whether the language was introduced at 8, 11, 14, or 18!

[20]Buckby, *op. cit.*, citing Stern, p. 14.

HOW DO ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS AFFECT THE TEACHING OF A SECOND LANGUAGE?

Choice of Teacher

The ideal situation in elementary school occurs when the teachers of those learning French are classroom teachers with a good command of the language.[1] The Burstall team in 1970 surveyed the teachers of French in the experimental classes at the primary level, whether class teacher, travelling teacher, or French specialist on staff. Seventy-nine per cent felt that the most suitable teacher at this stage was, the class teacher:

> who probably knows the children better and who has a better understanding of children of this age.[2]

Another advantage is that the class teacher can teach French anytime during the school day. To these experienced teachers, familiarity with and appreciation of the individual student is more important than linguistic skills.

Although some teachers maintained that a specialist has linguistic competence, will devote more time to lesson preparation, and is a refreshing change for students, the Burstall study:

> would suggest that overall teaching competence outweighs sheer linguistic proficiency in determining the pupils' level of achievement in French.[3]

It was also pointed out that French will remain a special status subject in the elementary program so long as a specialist teacher is teaching it.[4]

Size of Class

Many writers in the area of second language learning feel that:

> . . . the alert and vigorous teacher can accomplish a great deal even with a class of twenty-five or thirty. But anything over thirty is unmanageable, by any method whatsoever, . . .[5]

In a class of 15 the child's chance of having the teacher's undivided attention is twice as great as in a class of 30. Repetition, so essential to the acquisition of a language, can be done in groups, but in this way a teacher cannot so easily detect individual weaknesses and mistakes.

However, the findings of the primary stage of the Burstall experiment did not indicate that level of achievement whether rated by objective tests or by inspectors, was related to the size of the class. Nevertheless, the report acknowledged that pupils in smaller classes have more opportunity of practising their oral French and that slower children have a better chance of participating in the lessons.[6] The N.F.E.R. study found that teachers of smaller classes showed a significantly more 'positive' attitude to teaching the language than those of large classes.[7] Their lighter work load is bound, one way or another, to affect the atmosphere of the class.

Interrupted Learning

As any other skill, language grows rusty with lack of practice. Even though a language skill is never entirely lost —

> . . . after many years of disuse, an adult who takes up skating, say, can learn the skill quickly if he really possessed it in childhood.[8]

[1]Lamson, Howard, "Intensive Language and Cultural Immersion: A Cooperative Method", *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 7, no. 6, Dec. 1974, p. 668.

[2]Burstall, Clare, *Primary French in the Balance*, 1974, Windsor, N.F.E.R. Publishing Co., Ltd., p. 73-4.

[3]Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

[4]Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

[5]Hall, Robert A. Jr., *New Ways to Learn a Foreign Language*, 1966, New York, Bantam, p. 82.

[6]Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[7]*op. cit.*, p. 68.

[8]Parker, William R., *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*, 1961, Washington, U.S. Dept. of State, p. 138.

— it is wise to avoid interrupted learning, especially at the elementary school level. A second language program should be established at the fifth or sixth year, and extended to the lower grades when possible, rather than cancelled in the upper years of elementary school, causing a gap in learning until the study is resumed at the secondary level.

Administrators tend to overlook the fact that before second language programs are introduced into the elementary schools, plans for their continuation must be made:

1. Will there be enough qualified teachers to continue the program in the next few years?
2. Do the teachers have a good understanding of how a second language is learned?
3. Can there be an effective liaison between the elementary and the nearest secondary school?
4. Can problems of organization and administration be dealt with?

Administrators should see that the teachers are as linguistically competent as possible and aware of sound language teaching methods, through inservice if necessary. Communication between the elementary and the secondary school it "feeds" should be good so that the high school can be prepared to fit the upcoming pupils into a suitable level of language learning. Organizing an elementary program is a very complex business and one not to be undertaken quickly and lightly. Rather than jumping on the bandwagon, a realistic and reasonable approach is essential.

Integration of the Second Language Into the Curriculum

Integration of the language into other areas of study poses at least one major problem. Often the teacher for a given class is not the regular classroom teacher but rather the staff language specialist or travelling instructor. Therefore, the school day is arranged around the language lesson so that suitable space and equipment are available. Other classes may be disrupted so that certain children may take part. In this situation it is almost impossible to integrate the second language into other subject areas.

However, if the classroom teacher is the language teacher, the second language may be readily taught in any subject area, especially geography, drama, math, physical education, and music. Now the learning becomes a "lesson in French" rather than a "French lesson", an integrated rather than a specialized subject. In other words, it is not trotted in at 10 a.m. and trotted out at 10:30, but is taught in the flow of the day's learning.

WHAT OTHER FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN A SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAM?

The Students' Ability

Should children of less than average intelligence be deprived of the opportunity to learn another language?

> . . . students who score low on aptitude tests, but are motivated to language study, can be successful.[1]

claim several British language educators, and also that:

> verbal ability is independent of "higher" mental processes such as generalization, abstraction, judgment and reasoning.[2]

Gardner and Lambert, known for their study of bilingualism in Montreal elementary schools, claim in a study of secondary school language learning:

> Intellectual capacity . . . appears to have little to do . . . with the ability to speak French properly . . . to acquire a characteristic accent, or to comprehend complex discussions in French.[3]

Primary teachers in N.F.E.R. experiment, the majority of whom were impressed by the progress of pupils whose ability had been measured less than average in other subjects, commented that:

> children of below-average ability in other subjects should definitely learn French as they often gain confidence in the mainly oral subject, despite their lack of ability in written subjects.[4]

According to Burstall, learning an oral subject can be a refreshing change to pupils who in other areas are "battling with written words, letters, sentences, and grammar."[5] However, with the introduction of reading and writing, progress of students in the lower ability range was slowed considerably. In the Gardner and Lambert study competence in French grammar, vocabulary and reading appear to be directly related to I.Q.

If it is the spoken language they wish to learn, students of lower academic ability may be encouraged to plunge right in. If, however, it is the written, their chances of achieving great heights are not good. But after all, these children did learn one language; why should they be prevented from learning something of another?

The Students' Background

Students' background, and to a much lesser degree their sex, may influence their performance in second language studies. Dr. Burstall presents evidence that the students' socio-economic background influences their success in French:

> On each occasion of testing, high . . . scores tended to coincide with high-status parental occupation and low . . . scores with low-status parental occupation.[6]

She cites four other educational researchers whose views support her own,[7] concluding that professional class parents give more encouragement to their children in a new learning experience and have higher expectations of their academic progress.[8] These parents probably understand more clearly the value of modern languages as an opener of doors to activities they foresee for their sons and daughters. Whereas children of semi-skilled or unskilled parents, who themselves have not had the opportunity or desire to study another language, are more likely to pick up at home the spoken or unspoken message that achievement in this area is not a priority.

[1] Lange, Dale E., *Britannica Review of Foreign Language Education*, vol. 1, 1968-69, Chicago, Encyclopedia Britannica, p. 47.

[2] Lange, Dale E., E. James, Charles J., (eds.), *Foreign Language Education: A Reappraisal*, 1972, Skokie, Illinois, National Textbook Co., p. 172.

[3] Burstall, Clare, *Primary French in the Balance*, 1974, Windsor, N.F.E.R. Publishing Co., Ltd., p. 65.

[4] *loc. cit.*

[5] Gardner, R.C. and W. Lambert, *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*, 1971, Rowley, Mass., Newbury House Pub., pp. 36-37.

[6] Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[7] *loc. cit.*

[8] *loc. cit.*

The report notes also that a history of failure in other school subjects, which again is related to background, tends to give children low expectations of themselves in a new learning situation (in this case the second language). However this is not confined to second languages and should not be used to dissuade children of low socio-economic background from taking it. Coleman, in his massive study in this same area, strongly indicated that socio-economic background is the single most determining factor in educational achievement in all subject areas.[9]

The Students' Sex

Is it true that girls learn language more easily than boys? Dr. Burstall reports that:

> In the field of foreign language learning . . . there are few studies which have supplied data on sex differences in achievement . . . Carroll (1963) did report that girls showed a slight but significant superiority to boys in foreign language aptitude . . .[10]

She found that during the primary stage of her study on how French is learned, girls achieved somewhat better than boys. She warns, however, against assuming that girls are better equipped mentally to deal with another language. Evidence tends to show that social and cultural pressures on the young girl motivate her to achieve in language study.[11] A common attitude remaining among many people is that acquiring a second language is more suitable or admirable for girls than for boys.[12]

As in other school subjects at the secondary level, the difference between the two sexes in second language achievement almost disappears. At this stage, there may be another reason why girls do slightly better than boys. Another language, especially French, may seem more relevant to traditional female employment opportunities, such as teaching and travel hostessing.

Effect On Other Subject Areas

Provided that the mother tongue is well established at the introduction of another language, most studies show that learning a second language has no significant effect on achievement in other areas of the primary school curriculum.

Carroll (1960) and Potts (1967) found that teaching a few minutes of a second language each day in the elementary school had no adverse effect on reading proficiency and general school achievement.[13]

Leino and Haak, after a three year study on the teaching of Spanish to elementary school children in Minnesota, concluded that:

> . . . the deletion of time from arithmetic, language and social studies to devote to the study of Spanish had no detrimental effect upon measured achievement in the subject area from which time was taken.[14]

Burstall suggested that the effort made by less able students to understand spoken French helped improve their powers of concentration:

> In French lessons, children have to listen particularly carefully and this intensive listening, which can carry over into other subjects, is especially good for the least able.[15]

[9]Coleman, James S, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1966.

[10]Burstall, *op. cit.*, citing Douglas (1964), Wisenthal (1965), Morris (1966), and Lunn (1970), p. 29.

[11]*op. cit.*, p. 30.

[12]*op. cit.*, p. 60.

[13]*op. cit.*, p. 42.

[14]*op. cit.*, p. 43.

[15]*op. cit.*, p. 208.

The Canadian team of Lambert et al from McGill University, who for a number of years investigated the intellectual and emotional effects of using French as a medium of instruction at the kindergarten and elementary levels, found that

> Experimental pupils reach as high a level of achievement on tests of basic skills which involve the use of their mother tongue as do control pupils whose early education has followed a conventional monolingual pattern.[16]

There seems therefore to be no proof that the learning of a second language is harmful to other subject areas but some evidence that it may stimulate other studies.

Inservice Training

The quality of second language teaching today in our province is spotty. Particularly at the elementary level, many teachers have not had sufficient opportunity to become fluent in French and many have not even been trained in the methodology of teaching another language. Many also are unaware of how age, individual differences and various organizational factors affect language learning and of what kinds of programs can be offered.

Since few teachers are in a position to give up their jobs and find the funds necessary to travel to the country where the language is spoken, or to enrol in a full term at university, extensive and ongoing inservice training is essential. This is especially important if we are to follow the advice of researchers in the field and use the classroom teacher to teach elementary French.

[16] *op. cit.*, p.43.

WHAT ARE SOME SUCCESSFUL WAYS OF TEACHING A SECOND LANGUAGE?

We have now looked at why we teach modern languages, how age affects their learning, and what various other factors influence language teaching. What then are the best ways of teaching another tongue?

To begin with, we shall want to discuss with the students the reasons why they are learning a new language: a deeper understanding of different cultures, practice in changing mental habits, more enjoyable travelling and better opportunities for certain jobs.

You may want to tell them now that:

> The new language you are learning will be easier if you do not expect it to behave like English. It will have different sounds and its words will have different kinds of meaning fitted together in un-English ways.[1]

The surroundings of the elementary second language classroom should be alive with visual aids (pictures and props) to stimulate and facilitate conversation. In this way we set up situations resembling those in which the students as tiny children learned their mother tongue. Where a word to be learned cannot be actually acted out or pointed to in the room, a picture is used, e.g., "Show me your book, Catherine!", "What colour is the car, Richard?".

The majority of experts agree that use of the native tongue be kept to an absolute minimum in the language lesson. The N.F.E.R. findings showed that primary school pupils taught exclusively in French rated significantly higher in oral fluency than pupils who depended more on translation or explanation in English.[2] There are two main reasons for trying to exclude English in the classroom. First, to help form the habit of thinking in the second language, (in which case translation is an unnecessary step) and second, to make count every possible and precious minute of exposure to the language. However, from time to time translation will be necessary to clear up lack of understanding. There is no point in leaving a student puzzled.

At the early stage in language learning there are two skills to be developed, and we must always be aware that one comes before the other. The first of these skills is receptive (listening and understanding) and the second is productive (speaking). Since the second skill depends on the first, students must hear frequently native or native-like speech. As they become secure in their receptive abilities their actual production of the second language will be able to develop.

However, we must keep in mind that long periods of just listening must not occur, especially at the elementary school level. The Burstall report shows that at all stages of the French experiment few pupils were able to tolerate lengthy stretches of just hearing the voice of the teacher or a machine.[3] We note that most students stated that they preferred the active speaking role to the passive listening one. And too

> Real language is learned in useful utterances which the child employs immediately.[4]

Certainly young students may start talking immediately, but they will hear proportionately more of the foreign speech than they talk at the early stage.

Children learn well through physical participation; if an action can be performed to support an expression to be learned, this is ideal for youngsters.

> At the elementary school level . . . dialogues are memorized, sentence patterns are practised, little scenes are acted out, language games are played, and songs are sung; simple stories with much repetition are related with the help of flannel board, chalkboard, or pictures.[5]

[1]Walsh, Donald D. (ed.), "Advice to the Language Learner", *Modern Language Journal*, May, 1966, p. 262.

[2]Burstall, Clare, *Primary French in the Balance*, 1974, Windsor, N.F.E.R. Publishing Co., Ltd., p. 207.

[3]*op. cit.*, p. 52.

[4]Rivers, Welga M., *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*, 1968, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p. 362.

[5]*loc. cit.*

As the beginners progress and start to put together simple sentences on their own, basic grammatical principles are introduced in context. Although we try not to stress grammar, particularly at the beginning stages, we must avoid neglecting it entirely. Dr. Burstall points out that the pupils in her experiment often had no clear idea of the

> . . . sense of the phrases they were using with apparent understanding. The pupils themselves tended to feel that their incomprehension was partly due to the fact that they were taught whole sentence patterns in the primary school, without necessarily being aware of the sense of the individual words forming the pattern. A 13 year old grammar school girl described the difficulty . . . 'We knew the phrases, but if a French word was picked out I could not have said what it meant, even though I knew the phrase off by heart.'[6]

One of the teachers in the primary experiment moved on to become language department head in a secondary school and wrote Dr. Burstall of her views. She regretted not having stressed enough grammatical aspects of new sentence structures when they were first introduced, but had been afraid the children were unable at an earlier stage to appreciate the grammatical points.[7]

Varied are the views on when the printed word should be introduced to the pre-adolescent. Most language specialists seem to agree that only when certain words are thoroughly familiar to the young students' ear and tongue should they be read and written. Children learning their native tongue speak for approximately three years before reading the printed word or putting pen to paper. Besides, the longer they have been coping with the sounds of the other language, the readier students will be to tackle something else which is new and strange, the written aspect. In practical terms in British Columbia, by grades 6 and 7 students, being beyond age ten and therefore a general learning style in other subject areas predominantly based on reading and writing, benefit from the introduction of some reading and writing.

Finally, it is important to develop:

> A warm friendly class atmosphere . . . The teacher must not relax his efforts to encourage full participation. He should be receptive to, and encouraging of, the students' best efforts . . . and should refrain from the ever present urge to correct every single mistake in class. The important point is that they feel free to participate and to speak the language.[8]

Learning a language should be enjoyable as well as work! We must be flexible in our teaching methods, but never lose sight of two facts. First, a language must be constantly spoken and used. Second, almost certainly we shall not produce truly bilingual people in the present system, so if we pass on to our students a willingness to try to communicate plus an affection and respect for another language and culture we have done well!

[6]Burstall, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

[7]*loc cit.*

[8]Chastain, Kenneth, *The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice*, 1971, Philadelphia, Centre for Curriculum Development, Inc., p. 200.

CONCLUSIONS AND CAUTIONS

Conscious of these recent findings what can we expect in the 70's and 80's from second language teaching in British Columbia?

First, we must keep in mind that all these studies, no matter how impressive they might appear, have their limitations. Language learning is not a cut and dried matter and many of the research conclusions are subject to dispute. However, we can learn much from these current studies and from those yet to come.

> Present knowledge about . . . language teaching is not complete, and the modern language teacher should remain receptive to continuing innovations in the field.[1]

With regard to the problem of the best time to introduce a second language, just because the elementary French programs have not produced a harvest of fluently bilingual citizens, let us not swing the pendulum wildly back to starting it in secondary school.

> In the 60's the mistake was made of expecting miracles merely by starting young. The miracles have not come about. Starting late as such is not the answer either.[2]

If early language experiments have not gone perfectly they are almost certainly a step in the right direction. Since so many competent educators consider that the length of exposure to a language is of primary importance, then to begin a second one by the middle years of elementary school may well be our only hope of improving language learning.[3]

If we are sensible we do not set our hearts on producing truly bilingual people. Our culturally isolated geographical location, the great financial cost involved in setting up an effective language program, and our lack of skilled and fluent language teachers are just a few of our barriers to fluency in another tongue. Traditionally, competence in reading and writing has been easier to accomplish in a setting like ours, with the problem lying in the area of understanding and speaking. However, we must teach a language to be spoken, constantly stressing and encouraging the aural-oral aspects.

Only through immersion programs, where French is used as the only language of instruction for a year or more and then is used as the major lanugage of instruction throughout the elementary school, could we expect to produce truly bilingual people.

What then can we realistically hope to achieve in the way of language skills? We can expect that our students will develop abilities in comprehension and speaking ranging from basic communication: "One ticket to Geneva, please" to an actual working knowledge of the second language, for example, the ability to discuss in simple terms a movie seen recently. And even more important, we hope that although our students may not always speak perfectly they are always willing to try to communicate.

So besides hoping that a second language can make a valuable contribution to the educational development of our students, let's ask if the language we teach can be actually used. This is our challenge!

[1]Chastain, Kenneth, *The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice*, 1971, Philadelphia, Centre for Curriculum Development, Inc., pp. 154-155.

[2]Stern, H.H., *Optimal Age — Myth or Reality?*, May, 1975, University of Toronto, in an address to the fifth Annual Conference of the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, Edmonton, Alberta.

[3]Buckby, Michael, *Is Primary French Really in the Balance?*, Unpublished report, 1975, Language Teaching Centre, University of York, England, pp. 1-14.

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